

Lauralyn Lewis
Old Lyme, CT
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H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

I am testifying against HB 5044. There are more than two thousand clients of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) who are without a residential placement and now one hundred clients are waiting for day services. Governor Malloy stated in an autumn press conference that he will continue to exercise the five percent rescission authority he has to cut from state agencies and that it is up to the legislature to find alternatives to this. This is the now the job before you, again. It is time to turn off the spigot of funds leaving the DDS. Human lives – the most vulnerable in our state - look to you now for prioritization.

I attended Governor Malloy's Town Hall meeting in Stanford last week. He spoke of shared sacrifice while there is a budget deficit. As a mother of a son who has an intellectual disability I have watched as approximately fifty million dollars has been cut from the DDS since 2012 while projects in towns went forward with state money. That is not shared sacrifice. And it is a huge waste of the taxpayers' money that funds Birth to Three and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to then leave those individuals at home where hard learned skills erode. I'm certain if taxpayers learned that special education dollars were essentially being thrown away because DDS funding is being allowed to erode, there would be an outcry in this state.

Special education dollars were not wasted on my son, nor is the DDS funding my son receives now after becoming an emergency due to his cancer diagnosis. My son contributes to society by volunteering at a soup kitchen, delivering books to seniors, voting, advocating for his peers and having shared classrooms with typical peers during developing years. Those typical peers are the young adults contributing to society today and are taxpayers. Sharing the classroom with my son had lifelong lessons for those peers, lessons we could all benefit from, as was demonstrated through a note posted by a former classmate about my son after his cancer diagnosis:

"I know that everyone from my small town of Old Lyme knows Justin, but for any of my other friends who may not have had the pleasure, I'll put it this way: if someone were to say 'look on the bright side' Justin IS 'the bright side.' His unwavering positive attitude and ever-present smile both captivate and inspire all of us who know him. I cherish my childhood memories with Justin because sadly, I haven't seen him very often since he was reassigned to a school that could more effectively address his needs as a person with Down's syndrome. I was devastated to discover that he is currently battling stage 3 cancer. Justin has always gone out of his way to make me feel special; time and time again he has reminded me that true, unadulterated "goodness" exists in people, just by being who he is, someone who contributes only positivity and happiness to this world."

Members of the Appropriations Committee, it is unlikely that you attended classes with individuals who have an intellectual disability. Perhaps if you had, I would not have to testify today; you would have already put protections in place for DDS. Every one of you has constituents who have intellectual disabilities. It is time to get our priorities in order and today I ask you to secure funds for the DDS.

Thank you,

Lauralyn Lewis